

Estimating the number of international visitors within the Schengen area of free movement of people: the case of Spain

The practice in Spain may be considered a good example of the use of a combination of information sources for estimating the number of non-resident travellers arriving in a country. In Spain which, in common with many other countries of the European Union, dismantled a sizeable part of its border police controls in 1994, the result was the immediate disappearance of information, historically gathered by the security forces at national borders, on the number of travellers arriving from countries of the Schengen area. This obliged Spain to design and introduce a new system of measuring and characterizing traveller flows at borders in the light of administrative data from the various bodies responsible for the traffic on access roads, airports, ports and trains, and of the information yielded by direct surveys at all points of entry.

Spain has many methods of gathering information at borders, which is put to several uses:

- Border surveys: the NTA carries out two kinds of border survey, one on entry and the other on departure. The former uses a short questionnaire which serves to classify travel flows according to seven basic characteristics (country of residence, purpose of the trip, type of accommodation, length of stay, organization of the trip, age and sex); surveys carried out on departure use a much broader questionnaire which, besides the same questions used on entry, include a set of additional data on the trip (expenditure, frequency of visits, activities, satisfaction, etc.)
- Manual counts on roads: the NTA is also responsible for carrying out manual counts at the principal road borders so as to determine the number of vehicles crossing, the vehicle registration number and the number of occupants.
- Automatic traffic counts on roads: the road traffic authorities in Spain (Dirección General de Tráfico) provide the NTA every month with a record of vehicles entering Spain, as determined by the automatic counting positions that the NTA has at all road borders.
- Administrative record of passengers on international flights: the Spanish airports authority (AENA) provides the NTA with monthly records of passengers arriving at Spain's airports on international flights, according to country of origin and airport of destination.
- Administrative record of passengers arriving at ports: the authority responsible for passenger and goods traffic at national ports (Puertos de Estado) provides the NTA with a monthly record of passengers that have disembarked.
- Administrative record of passengers arriving on trains from abroad: the authority responsible for passenger traffic on national trains (RENFE) provides the NTA with monthly records of passengers arriving in Spain on trains with international connections.

Based on these official figures, the NTA makes a month-by-month estimate of the number of non-resident travellers arriving in Spain and identifies some basic characteristics, such as the type of visitor, country of residence, purpose of travel, type of accommodation and length of stay. Since 1995 it has used a sophisticated system, known as FRONTUR, which for each point of access makes it possible to combine the information from the administrative records, in some cases vehicles and in others passengers, with the data yielded by entry surveys.

More information on the data source and methodology used by Spain for overseas arrivals is available at www.iet.tourspain.es